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Back Seat Girls: Where Do Dykes Sit with Queer theory?

Anne Harris

SUMMARY: Drawing on the narrative frames of the "road trip" and "lesbian drama," genres which, it could be argued, normatively construct Otherness with all that is Queer, in respect to not fitting in or belonging, this article attempts to draw on queer theory to out gay male and lesbian relationships. Relationships between gay men and lesbians, constructed in and around identity practices, have been troubled by the emergence of queer folk, productively focusing attention on the differences between and within gay male and lesbian identities and communities. Using the metaphor of "road trip" to Queer gay male and lesbian relationships, I reconsider the question of lesbian presences in queer theory and in doing so seek to productively trouble the normalising practices of identity with gay male and lesbian relationships.

Introduction

Cruising through rural Illinois with two gay male academic colleagues heading to a conference in Urbana-Champaign, having flown from Melbourne, Australia, I started to query my presence in the car in relation to my male companions. Our shared desire to "queer" this conference, to queer the Midwest, and bring a bit of the Priscilla, Queen of the Desert spirit to the cornfields of America's great white middle-earth, was in many ways an impossible task What we found, instead, was that the Midwest queered us. Hurtling down the Illinois highway, with Donna Summer blaring from the ipod, a thought occurred to me: when did we decide that I would ride in the back seat? My experience of sitting in the back seat, while the men sat in the front led me to think again of how "I" relate to gay men within larger queer communities and how "I" relate to "I" within lesbian communities.

Breaching the boundaries between "I," "We," "Us," "Them" and "Other," we started telling of our multiple journeys, multiple ways of knowing and showing of ourselves. The specificity of our practices of self had a genealogy, including hooks' recognition that "[d]iverse pleasures can be experienced, enjoyed even, because one transgresses, moves 'out of one's place'" (153). Memory is a slippery thing and reauthorizing our experiences of growing up in rural Australia, upstate New York and small town Northern England, we plumbed our vulnerabilities and revisited the past in the present. Queer temporality (Halberstam, Subcultural; Sedgwick, Feeling)

"suggests ways of living that welcome the potential to affect and be affected in ways not scripted in advance" (Lim, 58), and as we left urban Chicago, we moved from gay to queer as we troubled the limitations of defining ourselves around our embodied practices of identity. Fraying our connective threads, we listened to each other's stories of how we had stumbled upon instructive possibilities afforded by queering ourselves and of how we had sought to reject a practice of defining ourselves through sexual identity, instead seeking out transgressive pleasures that come with re-imagining a multiplicity of selves.

The Myth of Sameness

In this shared journey, our "emergent identities-in-difference" (Munoz in Kopelson 30) started another journey. As I watched the cornfields pass by, my psychic wanderings drifted off into reminiscences from my years as a lesbian theatre activist in New York during the 1990s. I had come of age during a time when the few visible lesbian plays were generally produced in small (if iconic) poorly-funded theatre collectives, coffee houses, back rooms, and playwrights' apartments. This while Tony Kushner was taking Broadway with his epic Angels in America and other cross-over plays by out playwrights including Craig Lucas and Christopher Durang were winning top awards. Back in the back seat of the car, I was caught up in requestioning our own histories, and my positionality and voice as a "back seat girl." Why hadn't I renegotiated the seating arrangement? Was it rooted in a habitual deference to men, an imposed exile to a marginal role, or was it an expression of my own recognition of the agency in this power position which both includes and yet gives freedom to move? The front seat can be a limiting and confining space to inhabit, as centers always also are. My colleagues were not even aware of my discomfort, or my deliberations. I didn't tell them, and I didn't assert any need or possibility of moving. My back seat role, then, cannot be easily dismissed as the men erasing or placing me. It resides partly within myself, and within the multiplicity of identities with which I was acting in relation to them, and to myself. One powerful benefit of this marginality includes the potent possibilities of silence. Becoming accustomed to the space and the pleasure of the back seat was becoming clearer as we passed through the dusty brown landscapes. The enticing possibility of getting lost, in contrast to being found, named and made visible, offered up a transgressive positionality from which I had the freedom (not available in the front seat) to view the historicity of "I" from a variety of perspectives. The uninscribed/inscribed landscape of the American Midwest troubled neat definitions of in/out, front/back, male/female and reflected back to us experiences of our "passing" and "passing through" identities we never wanted to claim.

What happened in this car as we engaged in retelling our imagined histories? Falling between the senses of belonging/not belonging has layered my own identity(ies) as a gay woman, as a queer role-player, and the ever-moving landscape of the car. As my gaze moved between interior/exterior, once again I questioned how in 1994 as a lesbian playwright who wished to see my own and other lesbian work produced in major theatres, and discouraged by the generally (I thought) poor quality of the lesbian theatre I did see, I started advocating for more mainstream productions. In my efforts, I broke the golden rule of lesbian activism: I claimed that responsibility for the paucity of lesbian plays on mainstages was due in part to the plays and playwrights ourselves. "I think that women, and particularly lesbians, are not always adept at networking....[and] that a lot of what's being written isn't very good, and that's something people don't want to hear" (Harris, 18). I was cognizant of the institutional reasons which contributed to this situation, but I was most interested in ways of rectifying the situation from within the community rather than looking outward. Lesbian theatre, I claimed, was "second-class theater...and I think that's because most lesbians have difficulty seeing how they fit in to the world in two ways, both as women and as gay people" (Harris, 22). My comments ruffled some feathers. I received nasty phone messages from some (former) friends, and left some of my own. Solomon's scathing critique of our lesbian theatre development organisation, LEND (Lesbian Exchange of New Drama), accused us of "repeating the most retrograde stereotypes", calling us "young dykes coming of age in these antifeminist days of lesbian chic" (1994). We didn't for a moment consider ourselves anti-feminists or lesbian chic, just because we didn't share the aesthetic of what was being produced in the lesbian theatre community. She blamed the paucity of opportunities for lesbian playwrights on "doors slammed by male, and sometimes straight female, theater directors." At the heart of the conflict, I believe, was a positionality of lesbian identity as proudly (defensively?) marginal, and that desiring the mainstream was seen as assimilationist - the most unforgivable transgression imaginable. This us/them binary that was informing Solomon's critique had much to do with transgressions (rule-making and rule-breaking) of what constitutes "loyalty" in the fight for greater rights for lesbians and women in general within ideologically inscribed identity-based communities and movements. As early as 1970, the Radicalesbians (formerly "Lavender Menace") promoted what Sullivan calls "an idealized view of female relations in which lesbians had far more in common with heterosexual women than they did with gay men" (Sullivan 33). This idealizing of lesbian politics, sexuality and identities has continued at times to be detrimental to the development of a multifaceted body of work which represents the diversity of the lesbian communit(ies). Queer identities stand in contrast and

confrontation to lesbian, gay and gender-specific positionalities. And while queer theory continues to trouble notions of a heterogendred margin and centre, these divisions have plagued queer theory very nearly from the beginning. de Lauretis and Sedgwick have critiqued the major nodes of thought of the 20th century as "indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century" (Sedgwick, Epistomology 1). Smith highlights those who reject the term "queer" as "when I hear the word queer I think of white, gay men" (280), and Parnaby claims that the queer movement is a "movement based almost solely on a male agenda" (Sullivan 48). These reinscriptions of community and discourse based on gendered notions of sameness (and, by extension, difference) constrict potentially liberating performances of identity which go beyond sex, gender and sexuality.

Back in the back, the layers of perspective, and layers of memory were interrupted by re-remembering my mother's lingering death in Evansville, Indiana the previous year, two hours east of where we were driving. My continuous entreaty to my driving companions that they "don't go there" informed my Midwestern experience and framed my sense of the dangers of positionality which is defined in and of itself, not in opposition to an Other. This trip was not only where I was, where I was heading, but increasingly where I did not want to return.

The Myth of Difference

Who "I" am in this story so far resists teleologic statements binding me to the binaries of identity. So what, therefore, is the place of "lesbian" in relation to queer theory? I now want to turn attention to the troubling notion of homogeneous communities, both lesbian and queer, preferring instead to focus on the ways in which multiplicity might provide critique both within lesbian communities and within queer communit(ies). This special issue of InterAlia is one such way. And yet, even a special "call for lesbian voices" suggests binary, and in light of this, a lack. Will one "special issue" adequately address any perceived problem? Such special issues, in a sense, are doomed to fail: they cannot represent all needs, all voices within lesbian/queer communities. Nor would we want them to, if we take the tenets of a disruptive queer theory seriously.

These narrative reconstructions of both the Midwest 2009, and of New York 1994, offer an interpretation of another undoing of self, an anti-teleology of queer theory, which is what I believe queer theory is asking us to do. Nothing is fixed, nothing is singular. In this anti-discipline, there are no answers, only the freedom of acknowledging that everything we do is a fiction of sorts. If I refuse to give power to these categories of belonging, to these constructions of "back" and "front" seats, what becomes possible?

Any attempt to respond to a lack of lesbian voices in queer theory

reifies gay men at the centre of this discourse. My longing for the front seat reifies the primacy of that positionality, and in doing so remarginalises my own location in the back, while negating the advantages found there.

By 1994, de Lauretis queered an emerging queer theory with:

As for 'queer theory,' my insistent specification lesbian may well be taken as a taking of distance from what, since I proposed it as a working hypothesis for lesbian and gay studies in this very journal (differences 3.2), has quickly become a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry. (200)

While de Lauretis' objections to the development of queer as a discourse are widely known, Goodloe and others rely on binaries for a similar critique:

Stein's primary critique of this newly emerging 'queer' theory is that it fails to adequately 'compensate for real, persistent structural differences in style, ideology, and access to resources among men and women' (50). In other words, it privileges sexuality, in both political analysis and cultural expression, over gender, and thereby threatens to erase or reduce the gender-bound experience of lesbians as women. (1994)

Such "gender-bound experiences" presumes homogeneous notions of what it means to be lesbians and women, a standpoint this article rejects. Stein, Goodloe argues, asserts that "the new 'queer theory' fails to address gender at all, which makes it an arguably less effective political philosophy for many lesbians" (1994). But, as this paper demonstrates, any project which rejects binary definitions of identity (whether gendered or sexualized) promises much more than one which collapses back on notions of powered and disempowered, and which will, ultimately, limit us all. The potential within a queer critique is in its ability to accommodate limitless diversity; that is, reframing a longing for belonging toward a longing for a space where true multiplicity of voices and positionalities is possible.

Giving Up the Ghost: Silence, Disappearance and (In)visibility

This is not to suggest that the emerging queer discourse has adequately recognized its feminist origins. In the "roadtrip of queer" the past is present, and the present has limitless shape-shifting potential. To fulfill its promise, queer theory must first acknowledge the groundwork laid by feminist theory, which to date it does not, but simultaneously continue to expand beyond these origins.

Perhaps, then, this is my most fundamental criticism of queer theory: that it fails entirely to acknowledge and build on the theoretical and political work that has long been done by lesbian feminists, preferring instead to assume that it alone is capable of inventing and sustaining 'important' forms of political analysis for lesbians and gays. For so many feminists, the male arrogance that supports this

assumption is all too familiar, and altogether unwelcome. (Goodloe 1994)

Jeffreys believes "the appearance of queer theory and queer studies threatens to mean the disappearance of lesbians" (459). The impossibility of the "disappearance" of lesbians reflects a need for new ways of being, seeing and showing lesbian presences and perspectives in a practice of queer theory. Rather than reifying the very power structures that feminism was organized to counter, queer theory calls both gay men and lesbians to a radical rethink and rejection of those power structures themselves.

Castle, who criticizes Sedgwick for "ghosting lesbians and lesbianism in her work," (Martindale 47), is echoed by Martindale who asserts that,

[i]n the work of some prominent queer theorists, lesbian theory is waved away with a blocking gesture of the pen-wielding hand. Queer theory all too often refuses to cite (in the sense of mention as well as use) lesbian theory or assimilates it as a less developed suburb of gay male theory. (47)

Duggan "claims that queer identity cannot, by its very nature, be fixed, but is constantly under negotiation" (Goodloe 1994), something all queers understand theoretically and through lived experience, and this is what struck me driving down Hwy 57 in Illinois. While my position in the back seat seemed at times to leave me out of the picture, the forward-looking gaze, it also provided me rich opportunities for disrupting the work of driving which was occurring in the front seat. While my companions' gazes were limited, my own panoptical gaze allowed me to integrate perceptions from side, back, past, present and future directions. Goodloe insists that queer theory is not useful for lesbian feminism, although it might become more so and promises to be "all-inclusive" (par. 25). Can any movement be effectively "all-inclusive"? It is hard to imagine how, and yet queer theory still promises to be a step in the right direction by its very insistence on resistance, radicalism and refusal.

Failures to acknowledge are familiar to lesbians, feminists, and women, but such practices also exist within our own communities (as my recollections of New York demonstrate). de Lauretis reminds us of a history of invisibilising women, even within the women's movement: "in a way, one could say that women have disappeared. The paradox is this: Wittig, who had first proposed the disappearance of women, was herself cast in the essentialist, passe, or humanist camp" (de Lauretis, Figures of Resistance 78-79). From Wittig, Butler, Sedgwick (1993), de Lauretis and others, Martindale "connects the displacement of the lesbian in queer theory with older ways of "'ghosting' her" (47). Or in other words, we may be in the same car but we are not all in the front seat. Crucial to the task of resisting binary positionalities is the recognition within lesbian feminist communit(ies) that such centre/margin positioning has been enacted and maintained even by ourselves.

Any anti-teleological queer discourse must continually ask itself who defines our margin, and whether this positionality is truly more fluid than the sexual and gender discourses that have come before it. Back in 1994's lesbian theatre scene, Solomon claimed "[M]any recognize... that writers can only create innovative, challenging work if they're exogenous to the mainstream, as lesbians are (at least the vast majority of us who have not been ordained as chic)" (1994). Her argument echoes some current voices in queer theory, and yet it is reductive: identity politics of "outsider," "fugitive" or "transgressive" have dominated in lesbian feminism as the only legitimate positionality of radicalism. Those who aren't "exogenous" are categorized by Solomon, Hughes and others as simply superficial, chic, and thereby not "important." This is a hobbling argument, even within queer theory. And those "radical" lesbian theatre folk like Lisa Kron (who now teaches at Yale), Solomon at Columbia University and Hughes at the Michigan School of Arts & Design are difficult to now see as margin-dwellers. A more fruitful interrogation may be around the fluidity of the margin, the myth of the centre, and our abilities to move between and beyond these categories. Was my acceptance of the back seat for four days in Illinois an acquiescence to the male "mainstream" of the front seat or a strategic move back to the freedom of the margin? Was my brief stint as a driver during the trip a victorious graduation to some notion of the centre, or a performance of the fluidity of queer?

Plummer mentions, albeit briefly, the standpoint theory of Hartsock and Harding, which he seems shocked to admit he has "never seen discussed in this way" (366), and notes that "it is interesting that hardly any men have taken this position up, but other women - women of race and disability, for example - have done so" (366 my italics). Is this really so surprising? Many women would not find it so, and yet Plummer identifies an important ideological difference by noting that "[m]en seem to ignore the stance, and so too do queer theorists, yet what we may well have in queer theory is really something akin to a queer standpoint" (366). This queer standpoint may provide an entry point for a radical new lesbian influence on the possibilities of queer. Standpoints are fluid and resist constraining ideological definitions; a queer standpoint can be equally and continually renegotiated by both lesbians and gay men as necessary.

The possibility of silence as a power position is one such standpoint. When we look instead at what queer theory is not, or what it is silencing, there are infinite possibilities. In this intercultural era of identity and voice, silence has become a dirty word. Namaste believes that "sexuality... is something which is produced through discourse, not repressed through censorship. If this is so, the question of silence itself must be reconsidered" (Namaste, in Seidman, Sociology 195). The back seat in our road trip might be considered a location of silencing, but might be reconsidered more

profitably as a location of productive silence. Not only might queer theorists examine what is being lost in this silence, but what is being gained, or communicated. Silence, like sexuality, is always performed and therefore is always relational. Any performative or queer politics which seeks to extend understanding of ourselves as queered subjects is not "a regressive lapse into invisibility, nor a transgressive refusal of visibility, but an attempt to render visible something we still haven't seen" (Kopelson 30). Further than this, I suggest that "rendering visible" is not the only performance of power open to us. Like camp, visibility is also always relational and therefore includes the response of the viewer. The GLBTI movement(s) have fought hard to achieve visibility, but have often conflated this with the fantasy of agency and equality. Visibility as a centre or front-seat position carries its own inherently restrictive characteristics, including spectacle. While camp may have troubled the dominant centre at one time, increasingly camp and other performative sexualities threaten to be commodified (Halberstam, Subcultural) by the dominant culture which receives and categorizes them. In the tousle, difference and the sometimes-power of silence and invisibility may have been lost. My choices in the car in relation to my male companions, then, might also be suggestive of transgressive silence. Such a standpoint might highlight the possibilities for lesbian voices in queer theory not as disregarded - or as regarded - but as relational; that is, as present-in-relation-to. The back seat suggests multiple ways of seeing, being and knowing, possibilities on which the front seat forecloses; as such, it is a positionality of considerable agency for lesbians and others within queer theory who wish to retain a critical distance from the move toward commodification or teleology as queer theory moves from movement to discipline. And yet considerable scholarship within queer theory continues to focus on binary differences rather than similarities or resistances; crucial explorations but ones which - if left to predominate - threaten to continually remarginalize (and, equally destructively, re-centralize).

If queer theory is a project without teleology, its power resides in our ability to continue to shape and, to a degree, resist shaping, its practices and standpoints. This is an improvement over the lesbian-feminism I experienced in the 1990s, and holds enticing possibilities for lesbians and others who have traditionally inhabited the margins as a space of oppression. As long as lesbian communities continue to frame queer as another construction of male privilege, perhaps we are complicit in relinquishing the gains made by our foremothers. Power relations continue to be, in simplistic terms, relations. Perhaps, in this relationship, we have not yet discovered what queer theory can truly be, with the active agency of lesbian queer theorists as expert shape-shifters and liminal beings. Which brings me back to the back seat. Why didn't

I renegotiate the seating arrangement? Was it rooted in a habitual deference to men (be they gay or queer), an imposed exile to a marginal role, or was it an expression of my own recognition of the agency in this power position which both includes and yet gives freedom to move? Access to the "masculine"/front in queer is not about gender but subjectivities which are located in and through discursive practices, and they're open to all. Camp, with its openness to the negotiability of masculinities, is one such resistance to gendered subjectivities.

Let's Go Camping: Lesbians Can Have Fun

Perhaps my position in the back seat was a "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 141) or a habitually-constructed performance but the fluidity of playing around with gender in the car was apparent and pleasurable. My two colleagues used girly names for each other and generally "camped it up," as did I. Some might claim that there was nothing queer at all going on; it was business as usual. And yet, the queering of the front and back seats evoked the presence of camp as a practice that queers the everyday serious business of life with fun, with pleasure, a sense of adventure, and excess; our camp positionalities played with the binaries of our identification as gay/lesbian, men/women, and in doing so troubled notions of lesbian, gay and queer communities. Drawing on the work of Talburt (2000), Kopelson reminds us that a "possibility of excess" is needed to combat a "falsely unified front that itself becomes exclusionary in its disavowal of multiplicity within the group" (24) and this includes exclusions like the ones I experienced within the lesbian theatre scene in New York. If there is only one way to be queer (as defined then by "radical" lesbians) we are dangerously reifying a heteronormative "monolithic construction" of our "possibility of excess," an excess which - as Kopelson reminds us - is "productively disruptive" (24).

Halberstam (Behave!) debates the existence of lesbian camp and what might constitute such a category, including butch/femme role playing and/or male-female transvestitism. The fluid gender-slide occurring in our car on Highway 57, though, points to other possibilities for camp, including ways in which masculinities and femininities are up for grabs and not gender-tied. The boys could be girlish, I could be boyish, and we could all be queer and not-queer. Hughes, in her introduction to O Solo Homo, a collection of solo performance pieces by gay, lesbian and queer writer-performers, says of the groundbreaking butch performativity of Peggy Shaw that "drag always seems to signal both a peculiar form of gender acquiescence and a specific form of gender resistance" (6), very much like the slipperiness of gender as performed in our rental car. Hughes however seems to use the term "queer" interchangeably with lesbian and gay. Such unspecific use of the term can also

reproduce exclusions and homogeneity present in wider gay and heterosexist discourses. Carlson cautions against an "underlying binary logic that governs identity formation" (108), even within the gay community itself. Any hierarchy of "radicalization" is reminiscent of the "outings" of the 1990s, which equally polarized many within LGBTI communities. Some believed instead that direct action groups like ACT UP should respect the rights of those gay and lesbian individuals who were, initially, running from the disrespecting practices of the straight world - only to run full frontal into the disrespecting practices of the gay world. The moral imperative that "out" was the only legitimate political positionality disregarded (and still does) the differences of class, gender, race and region - and myriad other positionalities we must all navigate to live as comfortably (or as uncomfortably) as we choose for ourselves. My choice to enjoy the pleasures of the back seat can easily be read as not-queer by ideologically-constructed notions of identity, and yet my experience was liberatingly queer. Our Midwestern road trip highlights the need for multiplicity in emerging definitions of queer, as self-constructions within cultural contexts. Likewise, queer theory must not fall into the trap of reifying outmoded notions of what it means to transgress and, alternatively, to belong. As Stein and Plummer remind us, "individuals are not simply passive recipients of these cultural constructions. They use them creatively, accepting parts of them, rejecting others, to actively construct their lives" (220). This creative use of constructions is what my colleagues and I were camping in our car ride. These definitions, like queer itself, are mutable and changing, which is precisely its power and promise. Hennessy reminds us that the terms "queer" and "gay and lesbian" are - far from interchangeable - "contentious terms, signifying identity and political struggle from very different starting points" (112). Yet Hughes does not avoid the trap of divisive binarism when dichotomising "passing" dykes and "queers": "While Ellen DeGeneres is allowed to carve out a gay identity on prime-time TV because she insists that 'we' queers are no different from 'you' straight people, the artists in this book don't even attempt to gain acceptance by masquerading as your average Middle Americans who just 'happen' to be homos" (9). This othering of those who may in fact be "average", might well reject Hughes' imperative that they must be masquerading. While Hughes laments the "way in which nearly all gay men and lesbians had to 'perform' some version of normative heterosexuality before 'coming out'" (7), she does not hesitate to proscribe her own version of normative queerness. This is precisely that which many of us left what we believed was the normative heterosexual world for: a chance to not have to perform anyone else's normative version of ourselves, even queers'. Camp offers a possibility of playing with these versions of self, in fluid and anti-ideological ways.

Jeffreys critiques queer's reliance on "camp" or "drag," which many

feminists see as a "gay male notion of performative femininity" (Goodloe 1994). This is a static definition of camp which relies on binaries of gender, and which elides notions of camp as a performance of self/not-self, rather than Other. If "the whole point of Camp is to dethrone the serious" (Sontag 1964), then surely Camp is not working for feminists who see in drag queens a version of "woman." By deconstructing camp in non-gendered terms, however, more layered readings of excess and resistance are able to emerge. Halberstam (Subcultural 128) is concerned more with drag kings' co-opting by the capitalist mainstream and "tracking precisely when, where, and how the subculture" is absorbed, as she believes it must be in capitalism, or "the ever more complex lines of affiliation between the marginal and the dominant." These lines of affiliation are intriguingly blurred in a queer practice which suggests that whatever we choose to see as queer, is. Outmoded definitions of radical, marginal and resistant must continually be renegotiated as femininities and masculinities dissolve and overlap. Zita (1994) claims that drag kings perform as a form of survival, while Halberstam sees drag king performances as parodic, ridiculous, and explicitly entertaining, including "pleasure for the queer fans" and "sexual appeal of the drag kings" (Subcultural, 178); these performances enact artifice and exaggeration, and celebrate the undefinable. Everyday camping explodes Sontag's notions of "pure camp" and its alternatives, by troubling definitions of camp's practitioners and its audiences. "Pure Camp is always naive. Camp which knows itself to be Camp ('camping') is usually less satisfying" (Sontag 1964), but less satisfying for whom? If then, as Hughes asserts, (lesbian) camp is about both "gender acquiescence" and "gender resistance," drag queen and drag king camp can be subjected to the same interrogations and the same unsettling gender deconstructions.

As Plummer reminds us, "we have to live with the tensions" (357), and lesbian feminists the world over have had perhaps more practice than anyone with this strategic skill. Queer, according to Plummer, "brings with it a radical deconstruction of all conventional categories of sexuality and gender" (359), which supercedes discussions of equity and representation. In the end, the most enticing possibility of a radical queer theory project is that this is all up for grabs, and our only real imperative is to resist the structures of power and teleology which threaten to shut down the possibilities, for men and for women:

"Those wild queer theorists have started to build their textbooks, their readers, and their courses, and they have proliferated their own esoteric cultlike worlds that often seem more academic than the most philosophical works of Dewey. Far from breaking boundaries, queer theorists often have erected them, for while they may not wish for closure, they nevertheless find it." (Plummer 359-60)

Enjoying the Ride (or, Squirming Inconclusion)

As we neared our exit off Highway 57, I thought about this conundrum of the impossibility of closure and endings. Queerness can be, as I was in the car, distracted by questions of belonging /not belonging, questions which for me have never been answerable neatly along lines of gender, sex or sexuality. That desire for belonging in the lesbian theatre scene in 1990s New York was being reframed and re-remembered as I drove through Taco-Bell landscapes with my two gay companions in 2009, in a way that liberated my past experience from multiple binaries. Our interwoven journeys in the car provided rich opportunities to tell our stories to one another, and to reshape those experiences as they inform our sense of ourselves today. We were, in a very real way, co-creating and queering one another, much more than our anticipated queering of the Midwest, and that queering continued after our exit off Highway 57 and continues today.

The metaphor of the car, then, can be read in two ways: as backseating the lesbian presence/voice once again, or (more radically) of offering possibilities for what queer theory can become but perhaps is not yet: that is, a shared project in which we co-create shared story, purpose and pleasure, and of re-framing pasts. This emerging project has the ability to push us all beyond the reductiveness of our individual gender positionalities and inhabit the radically fluid space of "the road" rather than an outmoded adherence to fixed spaces/places/times. If, as Plummer says, "'queer' may be seen as partially deconstructing our own discourses and creating a greater openness in the way we think through our categories" (365), then it can also represent dykes who identify with fags, dykes who occupy "non-traditional" lesbian positionalities, and dykes who are co-creating a new discourse in queer theory that is undefinable, unresolvable, and anti-teleological. This is not to erase the differences inherent in a project such as queer theory, but to refocus an analysis on the possibilities for sharing and belonging, the possibilities for re-animating the past in an emerging present, and on the radical power of the margin.

Memory, as I've said, is a slippery thing. And yet, as I look back on 1994 from the vantage point of 15 years' experience, I see the ways in which our multiple voices in the gay and lesbian theatre scene were craving a similar project but in radically different ways. Today's queer theory offers possibilities of which I was not aware in 1994, for rejecting all limiting discourses of gender, sex and sexuality. Today I don't accept anyone's definition of queer; the pleasure is in creating my own. I don't have to belong, not with gay men, lesbians, or queer theorists, but I can choose to. This is the real potential of queer, if it is able to avoid the pitfalls of the disciplines which preceded it: everything is queer, so long as we remain open to possibilities and reject static definitions. The desire for belonging is strong, but it is

a chimera, a fantasy: for queer theorists today, notions of belonging suggest dangerous binaries which reinforce back and front seats, all of which are doomed to fail us.

We have learned from Butler and de Lauretis that there are multiple ways of performing gender and sexualities, in which we can share professional and theoretical spaces without automatically being sent to or choosing for ourselves the backseat, whether we are women or men. Angelides claims that "despite a resistance to homogenizing metanarratives, one of queer theory's primary principles is the claim that all identities, sexual or otherwise, are only ever constructed relationally" (163). If this is true, what my two companions and I experienced in the car in Illinois can be considered a queer project by (re)constructing our individual identities in relation to one another, identities which remained open to negotiation and possibility.

Queer might enable us to deconstruct what lesbianism is, what gayness is, in ways that are increasingly un-gendered, or meta-gendered, so that the project of queer may be to undo lesbianism/gayness as a category of belonging, and simultaneously undo the role of women in relation to masculinist and patriarchal discourses. If my companions and I failed to queer the Midwest, we achieved something far more radical: sealed inside and traveling through, not interacting in relation with some notion of this Midwestern "other," we were with each other, sometimes playfully, sometimes awkwardly, always multiple. Queer theory urges me to resist imposing understanding on people's work, including my own. The pluralities of this story and these identities is the only real queer thing. Any notion of gay/lesbian or feminist/anti-feminist is a specious argument antithetical to the queer theory project. How anti-feminist can my story be when I am telling it? Can it be both voiced and silent? Something remarkable happened in the car, that was not able to happen in 1994, because of the emergent possibilities and realities of who I am now and of what queer theory is becoming. The work of queer theory is in encouraging different ways of knowing, seeing and being, and as such, lesbian feminist perspectives are central to this agenda. This is not just a project for the present and the future, but one for our new understandings of the past also: as memory shifts, being shifts, and possibilities emerge.

Where does it all end: these questions, the roadtrip, this paper? It doesn't. Queer theory is the roadtrip, a journey involving transformation and change, into the future with no end. Notions of the past as a place which can be revisited and resolved cease to be relevant. The past has no teleology, it is alive with us in the present - everything is up for re-contestation. This paper can offer nothing other than the fact that it remains open and is unsignified. The notion of presence cannot be contoured around binaries, because it not only offers me a landscape, but the possibility of occupying it in

different ways, which is precisely what's queer about it.
Who gets to drive? The far queerer question interrogates the possibilities each positionality offers. Framed through openings (as opposed to closings), possibilities (as opposed to knowings), questions (as opposed to answers), the back seat is a rich location for exploring multiples. I value the voices and perspectives of lesbian and lesbian-feminist writers, both queer and other, and yet I wondered, as the cornfields blew by outside my window, and we sang at the top of our lungs to MacArthur Park, whether I had in fact become a gay man without even noticing. Because, in a queer world, I can.

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Anne Harris